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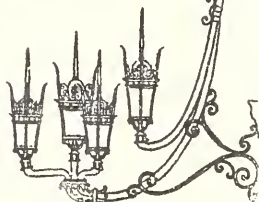
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ALLSTON BRIGHTON BOULEVARDS

Preliminary Text—February 2, 1990

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BOULEVARDS: GATEWAYS TO ALLSTON BRIGHTON

Allston Brighton's boulevards are the main streets of the neighborhood. These streets form a network which provides access to all areas of the neighborhood, to the surrounding communities, to downtown and the Charles River waterfront.

In addition to residential buildings, the boulevards contain a wide variety of commercial and institutional uses that provide services to the Allston Brighton community. The visual prominence of these main streets means they are especially important in establishing the overall character and image of the neighborhood. They also potentially serve as important visual connections between many of the elements of the city's network of open spaces.

Each of these boulevards has its own special character reflecting different land uses, building types, and roles within the life of the community. As front doors to surrounding neighborhoods, the character of each boulevard is important in establishing the character of these less visible residential areas.

Allston Brighton contains eight boulevards which have been designated as Boulevard Planning Districts: Commonwealth Avenue, Harvard Avenue, Brighton Avenue, Cambridge Street, Washington Street, Market Street, North Beacon Street and Western Avenue.

These boulevards are of three distinctly different types reflecting origins in different eras:

1. A "Grand" Boulevard with origins in the City Beautiful planning movement—Commonwealth Avenue

Commonwealth Avenue reflects the ambitious spirit and vision of the Boston Parks Movement. Its great width, grand landscaped mall, and the generous scale and character of its residential architecture mark this section of Commonwealth Avenue as unique within the neighborhood—comparable only to Beacon Street in Brookline and the Jamaica Way.

2. "Main Street" Boulevards with origins in the era of the streetcar suburb—Washington Street, Cambridge Street, Market Street, Harvard Avenue, Brighton Avenue, North Beacon Street

In many cases the development of these boulevards owes much to the advent of the streetcar which, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, opened up new areas of land on the perimeter of the city to development. Small and larger commercial areas grew up along the boulevards to serve the inhabitants of Boston's first suburbs. Sometimes these commercial areas grew out of older village centers—such as Brighton Center—in other cases they were entirely a product of new development. Unlike the predominantly brick, larger scale, residential architecture typical of Commonwealth Avenue, these boulevards are more modest in character. They typically include 1-3 family homes constructed of wood and set behind well landscaped front yards.

3. "Waterfront" Boulevard with origins in an earlier waterfront industrial economy—Western Avenue

Western Avenue developed as "River Street" which served to channel traffic to Cambridgeport and Boston's West End around congestion at Brighton Center. Its proximity to the wharves along the Charles enabled it to develop as an important part in Allston Brighton's early industrial economy. While the riverfront now serves a recreational rather than industrial role in the life of the city, many of the land uses and buildings which characterise the land area between Western Avenue and Soldiers Field Road reflect the previous, more utilitarian, role of the riverfront.

While planning for each boulevard must ultimately address its unique character and potential, each of the boulevard types described here present shared challenges.

Commonwealth Avenue's grand architecture remains largely intact and well maintained. And while planning must preserve and enhance this important heritage, the major threat to Commonwealth Avenue is the deteriorating character of parts of its grand landscaped mall. In the shorter term, improvements will need to focus on improvements to the most severely damaged sections. But in the longer term, a comprehensive public improvements plan will be required. In addition to restoration and repair of planting and

street trees, a coordinated approach to street lighting and fixtures, street furniture, and public signage will be essential elements in any plan to restore this great boulevard to its full potential.

The Main Street boulevards present a different series of challenges. If Commonwealth Avenue represents the grand vision of the Boston Parks Movement, the main street boulevards, which grow out of the streetcar era, reflect the vitality and diversity of the city's inner neighborhoods—its first suburbs. Unlike Commonwealth Avenue, which is almost entirely residential, the main street boulevards contain important neighborhood commercial districts. Excessive and poorly designed signage has in many cases overwhelmed the fine character of many neighborhood commercial buildings. Parking lots are often poorly integrated with the visual character of the street. Significant design improvements—through improved location or screening from the street—are essential if the attractive pedestrian character of these districts is to be preserved. In major commercial districts increasing the availability parking is a priority, through improved management of existing resources or the provision of new supplies. Other major concerns include the loss of "civic presence" in important public spaces such as Union Square which are increasingly perceived as being visually dominated by the car.

Commonwealth Avenue and the Main Street boulevards are almost fully developed and play integral and largely positive role in the life of adjacent residential neighborhoods. Western Avenue is characterized by inappropriate and chaotic land use patterns, poorly designed buildings and fails to serve as an appropriate main street for the North Allston community. Inappropriate development along Western Avenue together with vacant and underutilized land create a poor image for surrounding residential neighborhoods, prevent visual and physical access to the Charles River parkland, and isolate the Harvard University campus from the community. Today, Western Avenue is both Allston Brighton's boulevard with the most potential for change and the boulevard with the most potential to benefit from new development. Harvard University's plans to develop their Western Avenue frontage as a major front door to the university incorporating new institutional buildings and open space is an important element in the future of Western Avenue. However, comprehensive change is inevitably tied to change at Allston Landing. Allston Landing and Western Avenue represent one of the major opportunities for new growth outside downtown with benefits for the neighborhood and the city as a whole.

ANALYSIS OF INDIVIDUAL BOULEVARDS

• Brighton Avenue

Existing Conditions

Brighton Avenue connects between Packard's Corner—the Avenue's intersection with Commonwealth Avenue—and Union Square where it connects to Cambridge Street and North Beacon Street. As a neighborhood gateway, it serves as a transition between the larger scale institutional and commercial character typical of the area adjacent to the Boston University Bridge and downtown, and the residential character of the Allston Brighton around Union Square. Brighton Avenue, and its continuation as Cambridge Street and Washington Street form Allston Brighton's main street. This series of streets connects three important commercial centers— Harvard Avenue, Brighton Center, and Oak Square—and important public spaces such as Union Square and Oak Square.

Brighton Avenue is predominantly commercial in use, though it also contains a number of important residential uses. Most commercial buildings are 1 or 2 storey, residential buildings vary between 3 and 5 stories. In comparison to its width, Brighton Avenue contains relatively lower buildings than other neighborhood streets. Ground floor retail uses are concentrated near the intersection with Harvard Avenue. A number of auto dealerships are situated within buildings near to Packard's Corner and recall the area's history as an important center for auto dealerships and related activities within the city.

Most buildings on Brighton Avenue are built directly at the sidewalk edge. Where buildings have been set back from the street—particularly near Union Square—the street has become visually dominated by a series of asphalt parking areas which have been poorly integrated with the streetscape and interrupt the pedestrian character of this commercial area. In common with a number of the city's older neighborhood commercial districts, many buildings on Brighton Avenue are visually overwhelmed by layers of poorly designed signage, much of which covers older commercial buildings of high quality which could potentially contribute significantly to the character of the commercial district and the neighborhood as a whole.

Other than Commonwealth Avenue, Brighton Avenue is the widest boulevard in Allston Brighton. It incorporates a poorly maintained central concrete median strip within an approximately 100' width (building to building). The street incorporates very few street

trees and these appear to be in poor condition. The roadway incorporates trolley tracks which formerly supported service on the Green Line's A-Line branch. These tracks are currently used solely to access the MBTA's Watertown repair facility and do not support a passenger service.

Despite its important role as a gateway to the neighborhood from downtown, Brighton Avenue is one of the less attractive streets within the neighborhood. A number of factors contribute to this situation: the lack of street trees; the bleak and uninviting character of the central median strip which is both poorly maintained and has seriously deteriorated; the poor quality of design of many signs and storefronts; the disruptive effect of asphalt parking areas on the character of the street, particularly where they have not been screened from the sidewalk; and to a degree, the predominance of single story buildings on such a wide street, which fail to establish a strong architectural identity for this important gateway boulevard.

Nevertheless, Brighton Avenue has considerable assets and significant potential to reclaim its position as an important and welcoming gateway to the neighborhood. Renovations of fine commercial buildings such as the Union Square furniture store and the Nissan dealership near Packard's Corner attract attention to the true character and potential of the neighborhood's commercial architecture. St Luke's Church—itsself an important landmark building—and the Avenue's brick residential buildings also contribute to the area.

Building on these strengths while establishing a more cohesive visual character for the Avenue as a whole should be the objective for change on Brighton Avenue. Achieving progress is highly dependant on finalizing a transit strategy for the A-Line corridor. Removal of the tracks could allow significant modification to the character of the streetscape on Brighton Avenue with benefits for local businesses and the neighborhood as a whole.

Key Actions

1. A decision on the future of the A-Line service and tracks is the essential first step in any improvement strategy for Brighton Avenue. Removal of the A-Line tracks and the provision of appropriate replacement service would present many opportunities to considerably improve the character of Brighton Avenue. Removal of the tracks would allow incorporation of a new, widened and landscaped median area which could significantly enhance the character of the street. Alternatively the median strip could be removed and the sidewalks could be widened.
2. Incorporation of street trees, either in a new median, or on the sidewalks on either side of the street are an important aspect of any improvement plan for the street.
3. Better definition of the street edge through improved landscaping and screening of parking areas, particularly in the areas between the intersection with Harvard Avenue and Union Square is important.
4. Improved signage and storefront design will be important. In particular, the need to develop a coordinated approach to sign and storefront design within buildings with multiple storefronts will be especially important.
5. From an urban design perspective, moderately taller buildings (up to 3 or 4 stories) could, in the longer term, help to establish a more positive character in parts of Brighton Avenue. However, a series of other issues would have to be resolved, including accommodation of possibly higher parking demand; and possible impacts on immediate neighbors on the Avenue and in the residential streets behind. Buildings in excess of 4 stories are not recommended.

• Harvard Avenue

Existing Conditions

Harvard Avenue extends between the Brookline border, near Commonwealth Avenue, and Cambridge Street. The street serves as the focus of Allston Brighton's largest commercial district and contains a very wide diversity of stores and service establishments which serve the Allston Brighton community as well as surrounding areas.

The commercial district is divided into three different sections by the two major cross streets—Commonwealth Avenue and Brighton Avenue. Between the Brookline border and Commonwealth Avenue, Harvard Avenue includes mixed commercial and residential uses in buildings ranging from 1 to 3 stories; between Commonwealth Avenue and Brighton Avenue, it is a major, intensively used, commercial street containing 1 and 2 story buildings with a consistent pattern of street level retail, and office and other service uses on upper floors; between Brighton Avenue and Cambridge Street, the street is mainly commercial in use, in 1 and 2 story buildings, though it contains a number of 3 story residential buildings. A major off-street parking area, owned by the city, serves the commercial area and is located behind the buildings on the west side of the street between Commonwealth Avenue and Brighton Avenue. Buildings on Harvard Avenue are built directly at the sidewalk edge, with the exception of a few commercial buildings between Commonwealth Avenue and the Brookline border and a small section of the street near Cambridge Street. In each of these cases, the well enclosed pedestrian-oriented character of the street is interrupted and this detracts from the the character of the commercial area as a whole.

Harvard Avenue exhibits great vitality as a commercial district and includes a remarkable diversity of stores. While some stores incorporate unusual and creative approaches to signage and facade design which add to the vitality of the street, many fine commercial buildings, such as the Allston Public Library building, the Walton Block, and others, are diminished by the absence of a cohesive, coordinated, or creative approach to signage and storefront design. Their appearance falls considerably short of their true potential. Harnessing the true visual potential of the many fine commercial buildings which make up the Harvard Avenue commercial area can contribute to the long term success and vitality of the commercial area as a whole.

Parking is in short supply, and further construction of a structured parking facility in this area merits further study. In the shorter term, a variety of parking management strategies could be used to improve access to the area's stores (see FST report).

Difficult pedestrian crossings at Commonwealth Avenue and Brighton Avenue reduce the ease of pedestrian movement through the area. Enlarged sidewalk areas at these intersections could be used to improve pedestrian safety and comfort, adding to the ease of pedestrian movement and overall cohesiveness of the commercial district (see FST report).

The Harvard Avenue-Brighton Avenue-Cambridge Street triangle contains the highest concentration of billboards of any area within the city. Approximately ____ billboards are located in this area.

Key Actions

1. Addition of a parking structure to the commercial area is merited. The city owned lot between Commonwealth and Brighton Avenues is a possible location (see FST report).
2. Improved parking management including shorter term meters could be introduced (see FST report).
3. Pedestrian improvements at intersection with Commonwealth can improve pedestrian safety and ease of movement at this intersection.
4. Pedestrian improvements near intersection with Brighton Avenue can improve pedestrian safety and ease of movement at this intersection.
5. Improved maintenance of existing trees and planting of new trees is recommended.
6. Improved storefront and signage design is a key element in improvements to the commercial area.
7. Billboards.

• Cambridge Street

Existing Conditions

General Description: Cambridge Street extends from the Charles River, at Soldiers Field Road, to its meeting with Washington Street adjacent St Elizabeth's Hospital. In addition to providing access to the Massachusetts Turnpike, Cambridge Street provides neighborhood access to the Charles River waterfront. The street has three sections each with distinctly different characters. The first section extends between the Charles River and the bridge over the Turnpike near Linden Avenue and serves as a gateway to the neighborhood from the waterfront and the Turnpike; the second section extends between Linden Avenue and Union Square and forms part of the Harvard Avenue commercial area; the third section runs from Union Square to St Elizabeth's Hospital and acts as a part of Allston Brightons main street "spine".

Between the river and Linden Avenue, the character of the street owes most to its important transportation function. In this section, the street is marked by two sides of very different character. The north side comprises a mix of residential and commercial buildings. The commercial buildings are mostly 1 story (2 story buildings exist), residential buildings are up to three stories. Few buildings are located on the south side of the street—though it is intensively used. For most of its length it is lined with Turnpike access ramps and entrances to the Allston Landing rail yard area; nearest the river are situated Houghton Chemical and the Guest Suites hotel. While serving an important transportation function, this section of the Cambridge Street fails to establish the visual character consistent with its role as a gateway to neighborhood from the Turnpike and the river.

Between Linden Avenue and Union Square, Cambridge Street accommodates predominantly commercial uses in 1 to 3 story buildings. Two groups of 3 story residential buildings located on the north side of the street contribute to the character of this area. Union Square is a major crossroads which in addition to commercial uses contains the Fire Station, the Jackson Mann Community School and the 11 story(?) Union Square condominium development. Though Union Square has always been, and continues to serve as an important center of the Allston Brighton community, its present character is reflects more directly its role as a major traffic intersection. Significant pedestrian improvements as well as a comprehensive landscape plan are necessary if

the square is to recapture its true nature as a civic focus within the neighborhood. Much of this part of Cambridge Street, which serves an integral part of the Harvard Avenue commercial area, is visually chaotic but has considerable underutilized potential. The street is dominated by billboards and excessive signage, poorly designed or maintained buildings or lots, asphalt paved streetfront parking, maintenance, and storage areas. These problems currently overwhelm the street's considerable resources: an interesting mix of stores, including ethnic restaurants, well maintained neighborhood serving uses such as the Allston Car Wash; a series of fine commercial buildings, including the Chester Block, the Jack Young building, the nearby and underutilized Allston Hall building, and others; and vacant publicly owned land near the intersection with Harvard Avenue. With regard to the potential of buildings in the area, the renovation of both the Livermore building on Cambridge Street and Linden Avenue, and the former Harvard Avenue fire station set a very high standard for renovation and demonstrate the true potential of other neighborhood buildings.

Between Union Square and St Elizabeth's Hospital the street includes a mixture of institutional and residential uses as well as limited commercial activity. This section of the street serves as an extension of the central main street "spine" of Allston Brighton, connecting at each end to Brighton Avenue and Washington Street. Open spaces associated with institutional uses, particularly those around St Joseph's, give an attractive openness to this area which contributes significantly to the character of the neighborhood as a whole.

Key Actions

1. Between the Charles River and Linden Avenue, significant landscaping should be added to the streetscape to establish it as a prominent landscaped parkway, visually connecting the neighborhood to the riverfront.
2. New commercial development between Harvard Avenue and Union Square—including the PFD site—could strengthen the Harvard Avenue commercial area.
3. Potential of Union Square to serve as a urban focus for this section of the neighborhood—better control of traffic , narrowing down, etc.

4. Improved signage and storefronts required in commercial buildings.
5. Fencing and landscaping improvements are required especially between Linden Avenue and Union Square.
6. Sidewalk re-alignment near St Joseph's could expand the amenity of the sidewalk area.

• Washington Street

Existing Conditions

Washington Street connects between St Elizabeth's Hospital and the Newton border. Together with Brighton Avenue and Cambridge Street it comprises the neighborhood's central main street "spine". It contains four distinctly different areas: Brighton Center, the area between Brighton Center and the Oak Square commercial district, Oak Square and its commercial district, and the residential area between Oak Square and the Newton Line.

Brighton Center is a major neighborhood commercial center, with retail uses on the first floor and service uses on upper floors. Brighton Center contains buildings which are larger in scale than the neighborhood's other commercial centers—many are four stories high—which reflect the civic splendor and grand aspirations of the late nineteenth century commercial architecture. These landmark commercial buildings set the tone for the entire commercial district which extends from the Brighton Police station to Foster Street. In addition to the fine commercial architecture of Brighton Center, the First Congressional Church adds an additional visual focus. As with other commercial centers, most buildings are built directly at the sidewalk edge. A few exceptions occur at the edge of the commercial area—where parking is located in front of buildings—and these establish a less desirable development pattern. The most significant visual weakness in Brighton Center is the often poor quality of signage. Much of it is either excessively large, poorly designed, or badly integrated with buildings. Higher quality of signage—and sometimes storefront design—could significantly add to the character and cohesiveness of the commercial district, allowing one of its principal assets, the high quality of the commercial architecture, to be more clearly visible.

Between Brighton Center and the Oak Square commercial district, residential uses predominate with occasional commercial and institutional uses interspersed. 3 and 4 story residential buildings set behind well landscaped front yards establish the character of this area. Obtrusive streetfront parking lots serving commercial and institutional buildings interrupt this pattern and potentially threaten the fine landscaped character of this predominantly residential section of the street. Further expansion of non-residential uses into this section of the street could damage the current balance of uses and damage the character of the residential environment (current zoning would allow

commercial expansion into this section of the street). Additional development or improvements to existing uses in this area should aim to preserve and enhance the pattern of landscaped front yards which constitute an essential element of the character of the streetscape. Establishing a more direct connection and clear visual access to Rogers Park—through creating a gateway from the street, or some alternative method—would enhance the character of this section of street. With careful design, future development on the currently vacant lot on the corner of Lake Street and Cambridge Street could achieve this objective.

The Oak Square commercial district extends from near Fairbanks Street through the Square itself. It contains a mixture of 1 to 3 story buildings with first floor retail, and generally residential uses on upper floors. Oak Square itself mixes commercial uses with important institutional uses including the library and the fire station. Recent landscape improvements to the Square itself have re-established it as a strong visual focus of this area.

Re-use of the historic MBTA substation and redevelopment of the associated land can add to the vitality of the area while strengthening visual and functional connections between the Square and the commercial district (uses could include affordable housing on the land and, in the longer term, commercial or recreational uses in the building). Like many other parts of the A-Line corridor, redevelopment of this important site remains dependant of a final decision on the future of the trolley tracks. Recent commercial buildings in Oak Square—unlike the older building stock—are set back from the street with parking along the street edge. As with other neighborhood commercial districts, this approach detracts from the character of the commercial area as a whole. Again, as with Brighton Center and Harvard Avenue, improved signage and storefront design could add to the character of the area.

Between Oak Square and the Newton Line residential uses again predominate. The Church of Our Lady of the Presentation provides a strong visual focus for this attractive residential area.

Note to be added regarding Tremont Street between Oak Square and the Newton border.

Key Actions

Brighton Center

1. Improved signage and facades.
2. Track removal

Brighton Center to Oak Square

3. Improved visual screening and landscaping to streetfront parking areas
4. Improved access to Rogers Park

Oak Square Commercial Area

5. Redevelopment of MBTA substation and associated land
6. Improved signage and facades

• Market Street

Existing Conditions

Market Street extends from Brighton Center to the Charles River and the Leo Birmingham Parkway. The street serves as a major connection between Allston/Brighton and it's waterfront. While the area around Brighton Center is largely pedestrian and commercial in its orientation, the mid section is primarily residential, and the area near Birmingham Parkway auto oriented manufacturing and commercial uses predominate.

The southern end of the street, near the intersection of Market and Washington Street, serves as an extension of the Brighton Center commercial district. This area is predominantly commercial in use with 1 to 4 story commercial buildings. At this location there are several parking lots serving both Washington Street in the Center and the adjacent retail uses. A number of retail uses are auto oriented: these uses include a drive in bank and several small shopping center type buildings.

The middle section of the street, between Bennett Street and Cypress Road, is strongly residential in character, but visually dominated by the fine architecture of St Columbkille's church and related buildings which include a fine walled convent with beautiful trees. Houses in this area vary in style but are generally are small - two and one half to three stories, most with peaked roofs. Most houses have small to front yards, but a few are located at street line and a few also have larger yards.

Between Cypress Road and Birmingham Parkway at the intersection of North Beacon, predominantly auto-oriented commercial uses along with the large Bull manufacturing facility shape the character of the area. Buildings in this section of the street are mostly 1 story and most are surrounded by large parking lots. Land uses include discount retail chains, auto related uses such as gas stations and car washes, and fast food establishments all with poor site planning, many with blank building facades and almost all with large free standing signs.

Street trees are located on much of the eastern side of Market Street. Together with the well landscaped front yards which characterize much of the residential architecture of Market Street, they establish an attractive character for the residential portion of the

street. However, below Cypress Road, unrestricted curb cuts and the poor integration of extensive parking into the streetscape, detract from the overall character of the street as a whole and mar this important gateway to the neighborhood.

Key Actions

1. Improvements and change in the area around the intersection of North Beacon Street would do the most to improve the character of this boulevard. Restricted curb cuts and better landscaping of parking areas is essential. Improvements here would focus perception on the fine residential neighborhood to the south. These improvement would focus on pedestrian and vehicular safety at this difficult intersection and significant landscaping on the parking lots. Landscaping of parking lots could be usefully extended to parking lots at the Brighton Center area of the Street as well. Improvements such as these would cause the positive features of the street, notably the fine Church and residential architecture, to stand out and change the perceived character of the entire street as an attractive gateway from the waterfront to Brighton Center.

• North Beacon Street

Existing Conditions

North Beacon Street connects Union Square to Market Street and provides access both to the residential neighborhood to the west of the street as well as to a series of manufacturing uses and wholesale outlets to the east.

Very different land uses dominate each of the sides of North Beacon Street. Between the street and the Turnpike, manufacturing and large scale wholesale and retail outlets predominate. Most buildings on this side of the street are 1 or 2 story, though one rises to 4 stories. Often these include mid to large size parking lots. On the other side of the street, residential and institutional uses are mixed with smaller commercial buildings. On this side of the street commercial buildings are 1 story while residential buildings are 3 stories.

Key Actions

The streetscape reflects this mix of uses. A fine row of brick townhouses is located across from an industrial use and there is no real sense of 'place' along this street. One short term way to address this sometimes uneasy balance and attempt to insure an integration of sorts would be to concentrate on the streetscape: additional street trees (not very many currently in existence) and extensive landscaping of the edges of the industrial buildings and parking lots would accomplish this.

Currently this mix of land uses operates reasonably well. This is due in large part to the current commercial and industrial buildings making a positive effort to be good neighbors. From the perspective of the longer term, the concern is that current zoning permits uses which may not serve as good neighbors as these current businesses. This is especially pertinent in sites such as Mack Trucks.

• Commonwealth Avenue

Commonwealth Avenue is one of the best known boulevards in Boston, running from the Public Garden in Boston's Back Bay and extending far into the Western suburbs. The Allston/Brighton portion of the Avenue starts at the Boston University Bridge and runs straight for half a mile to Packards Corner. At Packards Corner Commonwealth Avenue veers off (the street itself continues straight as Brighton Avenue) to become a curvy four lane boulevard with landscaped medians, that winds it's way to the Chestnut Hill Reservoir. From here it reverts to two lanes and continues to the edge of Newton at the Boston College Campus. It is landscaped along it's entire length. From Packard's Corner to Boston College it runs along the boulevard, mostly in the center median but shifting from Packards Corner to Warren Street to the northern median.

At the Boston/Boston University end, Commonwealth Avenue is primarily a metropolitan i.e. 'city' boulevard, extending the BU Campus and the commercial and retail activity of Kenmore Square. Just past Packards Corner, Commonwealth Avenue changes to it's primarily residential character which continues for the length of the Avenue. From Packards Corner on, the boulevard is a fine example of the 'city beautiful' landscaped residential boulevard. There is one significant additional commercial concentration at the intersection of Harvard Avenue - where the Harvard Avenue commercial area spills along Commonwealth Avenue for a block or two on either side. Other small retail uses occur at street corners of Commonwealth Avenue providing convenience retail services for residents. These are often related to transit stops. Commonwealth Avenue is the home of several major institutions including Boston University, Hahneman Hospital, St Josephs Academy, and Boston College.

The residential building types vary in size from a few single family homes to small and mid size apartment buildings; most were constructed in the first half of the century and reflect a common esthetic and character. The buildings can be characterized by a close relationship to street, detailed and consistent articulation of the facade, closely spaced entrances, and bay or bow front windows giving the facades a similar rhythm and three dimensional quality. These buildings possess a sense of grandeur that fits with the boulevard. Building materials are most often brick or stone. Most commonly buildings are three to seven story apartment buildings with bay or bow front windows and a half basement that is used for either residential or small retail uses. Often a separate row house type apartment building is repeated in one half to one block intervals, giving a

sense of continuity and consistency to the block. Although this is the general pattern a number of smaller houses contribute a special character to Commonwealth Avenue; examples of this can be found between Melton and Leamington Roads and between Sutherland and Kinross Roads - where there are two to three storey single family homes. In many other cases buildings are larger with common lobbies serving many units. There are also a few instances where buildings are tall, most notably the apartment building at the corner of Chestnut Hill Avenue. Building stock is almost uniformly in excellent condition.

Commonwealth Avenue was developed as a grand landscaped boulevard which complements the stately residential buildings that line its course. The widest of the Allston/Brighton boulevards, measuring two hundred feet across in most sections, it was designed to contain extensive open space in the form of landscaped medians and sidewalks. On both sides there is a main and auxiliary street, with landscaped medians between these lanes (and the MBTA Green Line running down the center or the northern median) and with additional street trees along many of the sidewalks. Buildings commonly have small area of planting in front facing the tree lined sidewalk. A part of the landscape is the dramatic and hilly terrain which starts just past the intersection of Harvard Street and continues to the Chestnut Hill reservoir. In this area long vistas at the top of hills provide views of the Avenue and the surrounding areas.

A major variable in how Commonwealth Avenue is perceived is the condition of its landscaping which was designed to be a continuous green space. In many areas the trees both on the median and sidewalks are old and stately - augmenting the character of the architecture and creating in total a 'grand' effect. In other places some of the trees have died and upkeep is needed to preserve the continuity of the tree lined streetscape. In several areas including the area between Warren Street to Colborne Road, the landscape is in poor repair with parched grassy areas and dying trees. Unfortunately, and understandably some of the worst stretches of the landscape occur on the hilly areas of Commonwealth Avenue and the long views from these areas emphasize this problem. From the Chestnut Hill Reservoir on, the sense the landscape increases as Commonwealth Avenue skirts the Reservoir, the Evergreen Cemetery, and the grounds of St Josephs Seminary and Boston College.

Key Actions

1. Public improvements program: Landscaping should be the number one priority on this boulevard. Long before the potential proposal to change the alignment of the Green Line occurs, smaller scale programs should be instated.
2. Pedestrian improvements at major cross streets are especially important (see FST recommendations)

• Western Avenue

Existing Conditions

Western Avenue connects to Soldiers Field Road and the Charles River at each end and joins to bridges over the river which connect to Watertown and Cambridge. It serves as the principal boulevard of North Allston and plays a pivotal role in establishing the character a neighborhood separated from the rest of Allston Brighton by the Turnpike. While almost all of the boulevards of Allston Brighton have a strong pedestrian orientation, reflecting the predominance of residential or retail uses, or open space, Western Avenue—which includes relatively little residential or retail frontage—is largely oriented towards the car. Again unlike other neighborhood boulevards which are almost completely developed, Western Avenue has considerable potential for future development. Western Avenue is presently visually impoverished and fails to serve as a proud front door for the North Allston residential area—it is simultaneously the boulevard with the most severe visual problems, and the boulevard with the most potential for positive change.

Between Allston Landing and the Harvard Business School, Western Avenue comprises of land devoted to surface parking for cars and trucks, related respectively to the Harvard campus and the rail/ truck operations carried out at Allston Landing. The parking garage on the Harvard University campus is the only building on this section of the street. Long term plans for the Harvard campus, recorded in the University's Institutional MasterPlan, identify the University's plans to establish this Western Avenue frontage as a major "front door" to the University incorporating new institutional buildings and open spaces. Surface parking areas are to be entirely removed from the street frontage. Proposed buildings will include landscaped setbacks and will not exceed 65' in height at their highest point. Mature street trees exist on the Harvard side of the street.

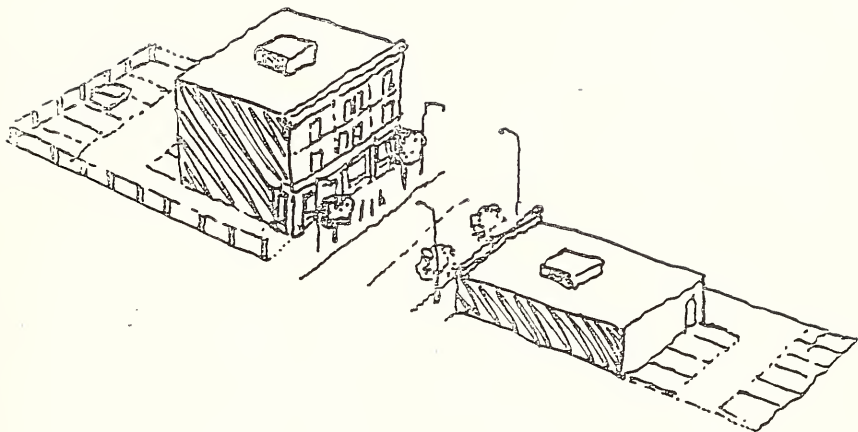
Near intersection with North Harvard, industrial, institutional (WGBH), and housing uses predominate. This section of the street is visually impoverished. Minimal articulation of building facades, buildings without windows, streetfront parking areas, a complete absence of landscaping, and the very poor condition of the roadway and sidewalks, all contribute to this situation.

The intersection of North Harvard Street and Western Avenue includes a number of retail uses, the 7 story Heritage Office Building, and the William E. Smith Playground—which serves as an important recreational open space as well as a connection between the neighborhood and the MDC's riverfront parkland.

Between Riverdale Street and Birmingham Parkway chaotic land use patterns, poorly designed buildings, few street trees, poor sidewalk and roadway conditions typify this section of Western Avenue. Building heights vary between 1 and 3 stories though single story structures predominate. Uses include major retail, a large concentration auto-related retail, office, industrial, and a small number of residential uses. Despite the proximity of the Avenue to the river for most of its length, it is both visually and physically separated from it by a series of single story office and manufacturing uses. Most of these uses face towards Soldiers Field Road and locate asphalt paved parking areas behind on their Western Avenue frontage. Not only do they prevent visual and physical access to the riverfront parkland from the residential areas situated between Western Avenue and the Turnpike, but their rear facades and poorly designed parking areas detract from the character of the Avenue itself. A high priority for any planned redevelopment in this area will be the re-establishment of Western Avenue as an attractive neighborhood street. Development between Western Avenue and Soldier's Field Road should aim to establish two fronts—both to Soldiers Field Road and Western Avenue. The commercial area around the Silk Mills also has considerable potential. This shopping area contains a concentration of some of the largest retail users in the neighborhood and unlike the neighborhood's other retail areas is primarily auto oriented. Its large parking area, convenient access from Soldiers Field Road, and its direct access to the waterfront parkland via the Telford Street pedestrian bridge are important assets. Future development of the fine Silk Mills buildings which form one side of this area could greatly enhance this area and establish it as an increasingly important commercial and neighborhood center for the North Allston community. This area is one possible location for a future Allston branch library.

DESIGN GUIDELINES

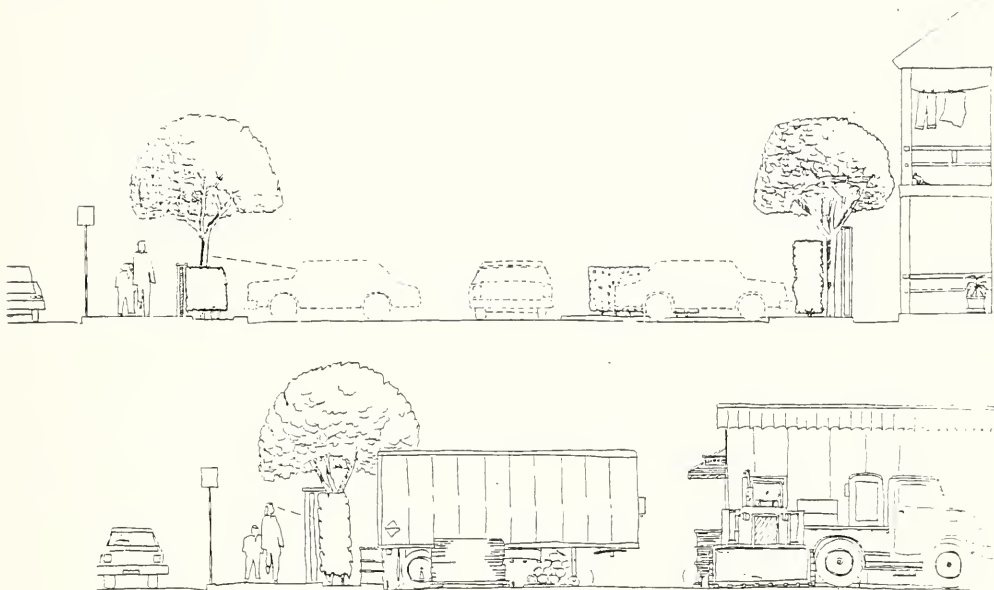
- Site Planning
- Parking Lots
- Screening and Landscaping
 - Buildings
 - Storefronts
 - Signs



SITE PLANNING

Site planning should support an active, visually attractive street frontage.

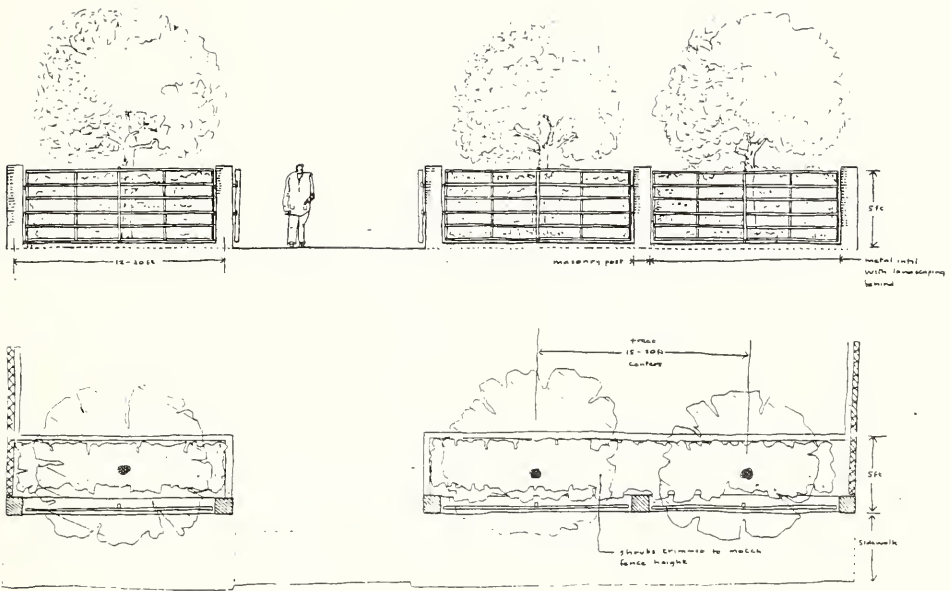
- Locate commercial buildings at the sidewalk edge facing the street.
- Locate parking behind buildings, away from street. Where not possible, locate parking to the side of buildings and minimize street frontage given to parking.
- Locate outdoor work and storage areas, loading docks and dumpsters behind buildings, away from street.
- Provide screening between all non residential and residential uses.



PARKING LOTS

Screen parking lots with landscaping and fencing from surrounding uses and the street.

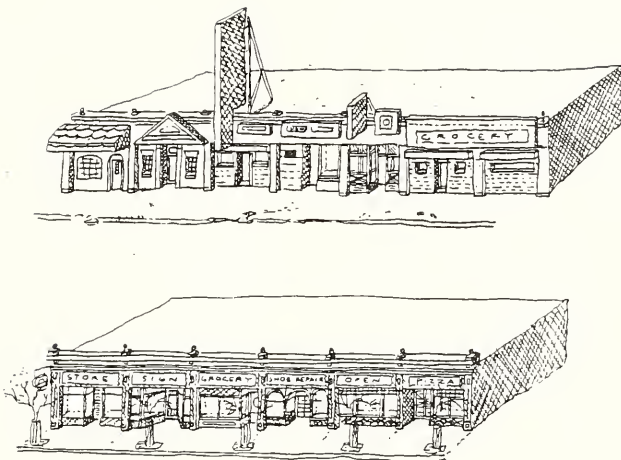
- Locate parking, outdoor work and storage areas, loading docks and dumpsters behind buildings. Minimize frontage devoted to parking.
- Do not locate parking within a front yard area.
- Provide screening between parking areas and the street and adjacent residential uses.
- Provide *internal* landscaping in larger parking lots in addition to the required perimeter and streetfront landscaping.
 - 5 % of the internal area shall be densely planted landscaped areas.
 - each planting areas to be at least 25 sq. ft.
 - one tree within the lot for each ten parking spaces (in addition to perimeter trees).
- Parking lot lighting shall be designed to shine entirely on the lot.



LANDSCAPING AND SCREENING

Landscaping and screening should be increased along the boulevards to enhance the character of the commercial districts and as protective visual screening between residential and non-residential uses.

- Provide visual screening (fence, shrubs, trees) between parking areas and the street and surrounding residential uses (3 ft high at street, 7 ft high at perimeter).
- Provide visual screening between non-residential and residential uses (7ft high).
- Visual screening comprises landscaping *plus* fencing.
- Use high quality fencing with secure vertical posts of masonry or metal; use wood or metal infill between posts.
- Include street trees, where possible, with new projects.
- Retain existing trees whenever possible.



BUILDINGS

New commercial architecture should respect the scale and character of the neighborhood's finest commercial architecture.

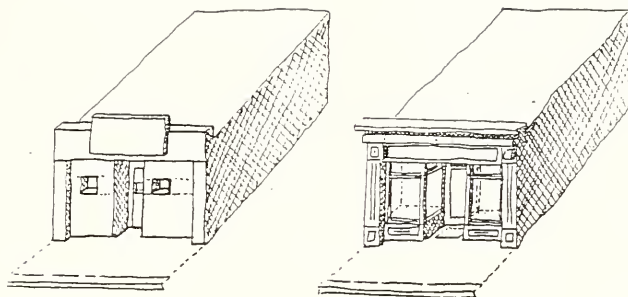
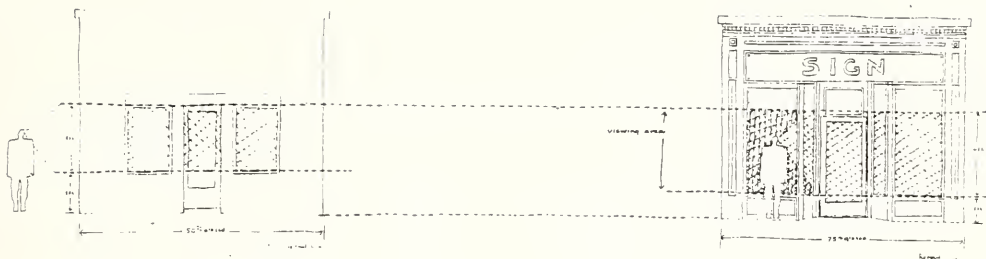
- **Height:** In general, respect prevailing local building height where this establishes positive character. Taller buildings located at the street edge are only appropriate under special circumstances--such as sites of special significance (detail requirements apply to each boulevard).
- **Composition:** New buildings should be compatible in composition with the older commercial architecture (use of frame; base, middle, top; etc.).
- **First Floor:** Design of first floor facades require special attention to maintain and enhance an active pedestrian scale environment and should include large glazed openings (refer to storefronts for glazing requirements appropriate to different uses).
- **Signs:** Include a clearly defined zone for signs on the building facade.
- **Materials:** Use materials and details which are compatible with the neighborhoods commercial architecture
- **Avoid the use of applied mansard roofs, wood shakes, and other elements which do not reflect the boulevards' real history or traditions.**

Buildings

Allston-Brighton Urban Design Study

BOSTON REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

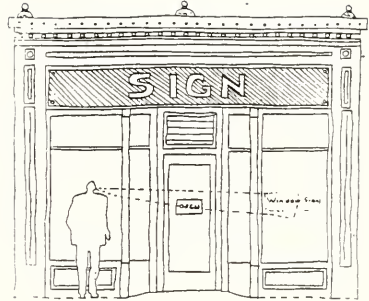
David Dixon & Associates



STOREFRONTS

Storefronts should be open and welcoming, and include large glazed areas. Materials and details should be in keeping with the neighborhood's finest commercial architecture.

- Contain the storefront within a well defined architectural frame.
- All storefronts shall contain large transparent glass areas. A minimum of 75 % of the linear frontage of a first floor of a store front shall comprise windows and doors with transparent glass. Sill heights for any windows included in this calculation may not exceed 24" above street level. Windows included in this calculation must be a minimum of 6 ft. in height (note: 50% glazed, 36" sill ht, 5 ft high window for non-retail).
- Recess doorways; do not recess storefronts within the storefront frame.
- Integrate signage with the design of the storefront.
- In buildings with multiple storefronts coordinate an approach to signage
- Use of awnings is encouraged
- Integrate security shutters with storefront design—recess within facade where possible



SIGNAGE

Signs should present a clear simple message, adding to rather than detracting from the character of the building and the neighborhood.

● Choose signs which 'fit in' with the character of the store, the building, other storefronts in a multiple storefront building, and the neighborhood as a whole. This involves:

- Size: Don't use signs which are too large.
- Placement: Where there is a sign band place the sign within it. Where no sign band exists place the sign carefully in relation to the storefront, the building, and neighboring stores.
- Architecture: Do not obscure significant historical and architectural features. Signage should never obscure the vertical posts that define storeframes.
- Design: Signs should be treated as part of a larger composition. Sign size, location, color, proportions, and materials should relate to the building on which they are placed and in multiple storefront buildings to the neighboring signs.
- Lettering: Light letters on a dark background are generally more successful than dark on light.
- Type of Sign: Use different types of sign to present different kinds of information (wall sign, projecting sign, window sign, freestanding sign).

● Particular care must be taken with signage on historic buildings.

APPENDIX A: LIST OF DRAWINGS

ALLSTON BRIGHTON URBAN DESIGN STUDY--BOARDS LIST

• BOULEVARDS

A. First Boulevards Presentation: Analysis of Existing Conditions

• Small Boards

1. Boulevard Types
2. Role of Boulevards: Centers, Gateways, Connections
3. Connections to Open Space
4. Turnpike Creates Divisions
5. Allston Landing Boulevards

• Large Boards

6. Land Use--Existing (2 boards)
7. Building Height--Existing (2 boards)
8. Problems--Existing (2 boards)
9. Resources--Existing (2 boards)

B. Second Boulevards Presentation: Design Guidelines

10. Site Planning
11. Parking Lots
12. Landscaping and Screening
13. Buildings
14. Storefronts
15. Signs
16. Design Guidelines/ Public Improvements Matrix
17. Photo Boards: Problems, Applying the Guidelines (4 boards)

C. Third Boulevards Presentation: Recommendations

• Small Boards

18. Planning Tools
19. Building Height: Criteria
20. Building Height: Street Sections--Existing
21. Building Height: Recommendations

• Large Boards

22. Zoning Related Issues and Appropriate Tools (2 boards)
23. Public Improvements Recommendations--Read with FST Boards (2 boards)
24. Building Height Approach

ALLSTON BRIGHTON URBAN DESIGN STUDY--BOARDS LIST

• ALLSTON LANDING

D. First AL Presentation: Analysis of Existing Conditions

- 25. Allston Landing Context
- 26. How It Works
- 27. Land Ownership and Control
- 28. Problems
- 29. Resources
- 30. Scenario 1: Immediate Actions
- 31. Scenario 2: Conrail Remains
- 32. Scenario 3: Conrail Relocates

E. Second AL Presentation: Strategy (AL and Western Avenue)

- 33. Land Ownership and Public Lands
- 34. Potential for Change
- 35. Current Problems and Resources
- 36. Planning Objectives
- 37. Development Potentials and Build-outs (at current FARs)
- 38. Allston Landing: Summary of Initial Conclusions

(Total Number of Boards: 46)

*** Board numbers are located on the top right hand corner of each board.*

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